

# A Czech take on Brexit

Milan Kocourek takes a look at journalist Jaromír Marek's Czech book about Brexit

**Drama zvané Brexit**  
Jaromír Marek  
Radioservis, Prague  
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**T**his book by Jaromír Marek, Czech Radio's London correspondent, is a remarkable analysis of arguably the most disappointing British political saga of the post-World War II era. The author deserves huge praise for his impartiality. This is a diligently researched narrative that reads exceedingly well and yet is lightened with humorous touches.

There are also excellent cartoons by Rytis Daukantas of *Politico* which are supplemented by the author's own photographs.

As an amateur photographer Marek has managed to present a fascinating portrait of the United Kingdom not only in the Brexit context. His images of the English, Scottish and Irish countryside are fascinating on their own merit, such as a pub said to have been established in 1189 in a rock under Nottingham Castle. Looking at the photograph I wished I could have a pint there.

There are many dozens of books on Brexit, written by personalities ranging from cartoonists to politicians. *Brexit Cartoons* published by Penguin in 2018 is among the best.

The former deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's essay *How to Stop Brexit* (Bodley Head, 2017) even offers a detailed guidance on how to start political parties to prevent Brexit. Clegg skilfully presents the arguments for both sides of the 2016 referendum, yet Marek's treatment is more informative and entirely non-partisan.

Apart from a detailed analysis of events around the June 2016 referendum on the British membership in the EU and developments up to the election of the new prime minister in July this year, Marek offers biographies of the main personalities concerned with Brexit: Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, David Cameron, Theresa May and Nigel Farage.

One of the most interesting is Marek's story of Boris Johnson's u-turn from enthusiastic support for the EU to virulent opposition.

In March 2016 Johnson described UK membership of the European Union in *The Daily Telegraph* as a blessing both for Europe and the world while



praising the benefits drawn by British companies from EU markets; during the referendum campaign a few months later he took a decisive anti-EU stand and became the main horse pulling the Brexit wagon.

One of the most controversial issues during the negotiations after the referendum was the so-called Irish backstop, an arrangement by which restoration of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic was to be avoided until a permanent solution could be found. Marek explains the complexity of tough negotiations concerning the Irish backstop in a simple way, understandable to any reader.

J A Hazeley and J P Morris, authors of *The Story of Brexit*, a tongue-in-cheek Ladybird book published in 2018, write about Britain being a proud island which for centuries stood alone. "Now we stand alone again," the authors say, arguing that some other countries, such as Croatia and Spain, need to be a part of Europe, "because they are clearly cowards. But our country is special, and other countries are queuing up to get what we have to offer, whether it is the music of

Sting, or any of our several mild cheeses. This is the future..."

This whiff of humorous arrogance, perhaps typical of British authors who want to allude – however indirectly – to Britain's glorious colonial past, is missing altogether from Jaromír Marek's skilful analysis.

However, he presents some nationalistic views of personalities such as Nigel Farage, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Nicola Sturgeon, who would probably agree with the wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill's statement: "We are in Europe, but thank God we are separated from it by the sea."

Who was the most interesting person Jaromír Marek interviewed during the research for the book? He told me it was Sir John Tusa, the Zlín-born former director general of the BBC World Service, who offered him some of the most interesting insights as a conscientious observer with the gift of being a Czech-born Brit.

To the question who in his opinion will win the general election on December 12 and whether Boris Johnson will push his deal with Brussels through Parliament, Marek replied that if

Johnson's Tories in the election get the necessary majority, Johnson's deal will be approved and the United Kingdom will be out of the EU by the end of January.

However, Marek thinks the election result probably will not be much different from the last one, meaning that the Tories will not get an absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons.

On the future of Britain outside the EU Marek says that while it is understandable that the British want to get rid of the shackles of the EU, they will be heading into the embrace of the United States. Whereas within the EU Britain was pulling the rope on its long end, after Brexit it would be pulling the rope on a much shorter end.

Jaromír Marek has avoided economic issues in his book because, he said, economic prognoses are highly unreliable and speculative.

Boris Johnson and Brexiteers say the UK will easily negotiate new trade agreements.

However, Marek said he was asking himself what the UK would be offering to trading partners? The epicentre of British services has been tied to the European Union. The future may be different – some important companies may move out of Britain to new and more logical locations outside Britain.

In almost every book there are some mistakes in the text to be avoided in a second edition. *Drama called Brexit* by Jaromír Marek is no exception.

One of the mistakes is the wrong gender of the chairperson of the Exiting the European Union Select Committee, Hillary Bennová, another is the incorrectly named former leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vince Clark. His name is in fact Sir Vince Cable of course.

Jaromír Marek's book is an excellent source of information for anyone interested in British affairs that are awfully muddled at the moment and cause a lot of concern not only in the United Kingdom.

The book in my opinion fully deserves to be translated into English.